

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1-28. (Canceled)

29. (Currently amended) A method of removing a portion of a concrete surface by the effect of thermal shock, the method comprising:

providing a beam of laser light;

providing a mask of hollow cylindrical form having a single central aperture therethrough;

irradiating a location of the surface with the laser light by directing the beam through the central aperture of the mask such that the mask blocks;~~and mounting a mask to cover~~ a peripheral part of the beam of laser light [so as to remove] and thereby removes a low power density part of the laser beam that is below a threshold power density for surface removal before the surface location is irradiated.

30. (Canceled)

31. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a concrete surface according to claim 29, wherein the mask is a shadow mask which absorbs substantially all of that portion of the laser beam that is below the threshold power density.

32. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a concrete surface according to claim 29, wherein the mask is a reflective mask which reflects light incident thereon.

33. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a concrete surface according to claim 32, wherein the reflective mask redirects lower power density laser light to another low power density portion of the laser beam to create an additional high power density portion of the laser beam.

34-45. (Canceled)

46. (Currently amended) A method of removing a portion of a natural stone surface by the effect of thermal shock, the method comprising:

providing a beam of laser light;

providing a mask of hollow cylindrical form having a single central aperture therethrough;

irradiating a location of the surface with the laser light by directing the beam through the central aperture of the mask such that the mask blocks,~~and mounting a mask to~~
~~cover~~ a peripheral part of the beam of laser light [so as to remove] and thereby removes a low power density part of the laser beam that is below a threshold power density for surface

removal before the surface location is irradiated.

47. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a natural stone surface according to claim 46, wherein the mask is a shadow mask which absorbs substantially all of that portion of the laser beam that is below the threshold power density.

48. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a natural stone surface according to claim 46, wherein the mask is a reflective mask which reflects light incident thereon.

49. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a natural stone surface according to claim 48, wherein the reflective mask redirects lower power density laser light to another low power density portion of the laser beam to create an additional high power density portion of the laser beam.

50. (Previously presented) A method of removing a portion of a natural stone surface according to claim 46, wherein the surface portion is removed by the effect of thermal shock.

51. (New) An apparatus for removing a portion of a

concrete surface by the effect of thermal shock, the apparatus comprising:

a laser source for producing a beam of laser light for irradiating a location on the surface;

a mask of hollow cylindrical form having a single central aperture there through, the mask being mounted relative to the laser source such that the beam is directed through the central aperture of the mask with the mask blocking a peripheral part of the beam of laser light and thereby removing a low-power density part of the laser beam that is below a threshold power density for surface removal before the surface location is irradiated.